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Countering anti-Muslim attitudes among Christian and religiously unaffiliated
13- to 15-year-old students in England and Wales: Testing the contact hypothesis

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Abstract

Drawing on data provided by 5,811 students from schools in England, Wales and London who self-identified as either ‘no religion’ or as Christian, this study explored the effect of the contact hypothesis (having friends who are Muslims) on scores recorded on the seven-item Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude (SAMA), after controlling for type of school (with or without a religious character), location (England, Wales, and London), personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) and religious factors (self-assigned affiliation as Christian, worship attendance, and belief in God). The data demonstrated the positive effect of having friends who are Muslim on lowering anti-Muslim attitudes. The path is then described from educational research to curriculum development in the design of resources that offer young learners vicarious experience of having friends who are Muslims.

Keywords: Islamophobia, contact hypothesis, educational resources, research impact

Introduction

Research problem

Francis and McKenna (2018) explored and documented the experience of victimisation among Muslim adolescents in the UK. They identified an extensive literature drawing attention to the verbal and physical abuse experienced by young people on either racial or religious grounds. For example, in 2013 the NSPCC and Childline published a report on school-age children who had contacted the organisation for counselling. The report found that in 2012-2013 over 1,400 young people had experienced racist bullying, a 69% increase on 2011-2012. A common theme was for young people to be called a 'terrorist' or a 'bomber'. A common cry was for these young people 'to go back to where they came from' (NSPCC/Childline, 2013, p. 41). Media reports have linked increasing victimisation of Muslim students to the Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris (Milmo, 2015) and to the Brexit vote in Britain (Jeory, 2016). Moreover, it has also been claimed that recent UK government initiatives on counter-terrorism have made Muslim students more vulnerable to victimisation. For example, writing in *The Guardian*, Qurashi (2016) claimed that:

it is clear that the Prevent strategy centres on Muslims in the way that it frames the threat of extremism and terrorism. Added to this, the allocation of Prevent funding, which was based on the number of Muslims in a local authority. This explicit targeting demonstrates that Islamophobia is central in shaping how the government (and wider society) define and construct extremism and terrorism as solely Islamic problems. (Qurashi, 2016)

Such victimisation of Muslim adolescents is not a new phenomenon in Britain. For example, in reporting incidents of racism experienced by children, Verma, Zec, and Skinner (1994) found that Muslim boys reported suffering the highest rates of racism at school. Similar results were found by Archer (2003, 2012) who gave attention specifically to British

Muslim boys' identities and experiences in relation to schooling. The boys recounted how their daily commute to school required them to negotiate numerous experiences of verbal and physical racism. In one interview transcript, a boy referred to derogatory and racially insulting name-calling (Archer, 2003, p. 108), and in another interview transcript a boy recounted incidents of people throwing eggs at the windows of Asian homes and throwing rubbish in their gardens, younger siblings being intimidated and being beaten up. This boy viewed 'racism as arising from white people's responses to newness, change and arrival of unknown others' (p. 109). Within the school environment, the boys in Archer's (2003) study described their experiences of racism as mostly linked to physical bullying (often experienced by younger students), recounting fights and attacks, emphasizing the physical injuries sustained by those involved (p. 124), and again referencing the specifically colour-based context of racism through name-calling (p. 13). According to Archer the boys were asserting the 'natural' colour difference between whites and Asians as being a source of conflict.

While Muslim girls, like Muslim boys, may experience stereotyping and low expectations, there are also some differences in their experiences. The racism to which they are subjected has been found to be less about colour and more to do with the wearing of visible outward symbols of their faith which has led to an increase in fear and perceived vulnerability in schools and public spaces. As noted by Bowlby and Lloyd-Evans (2012), recent political controversy over the rights of Muslim women to wear the veil has heightened sensitivities around dress and appearance. They cite the work of Hopkins and Patel (2006) who found that women who were visibly Muslim were more likely to report discrimination in the labour market than those who adopted a more Western appearance when they were in public spaces. Likewise, the research of Anwar and Shah (2000) found Muslim girls had been excluded from schools because they wanted to wear headscarves.

The findings from the literature cited above suggests that those who engage in racist bullying towards Muslim young people tend to direct their abuse to any cultural aspect of their targets, whether it is skin colour or religious belonging, whether it is assumed or deduced from visible signs such as items of clothing, as in the case of young female Muslims wearing the headscarf. At the root of the abuse is what is different or ‘other’ and the abusers’ attitudes to difference and otherness. The intermingling of race/ethnicity and religion makes it hard to see which of the two might be the primary issue—is it religious identity or race/ethnicity that prompts this kind of victimisation? This raises the question of culture and how culture and religion relate to one another. According to Parekh, both are closely intertwined:

Culture and religion influence each other at various levels. Religion shapes a culture’s system of beliefs and practices [...]. For its part, culture influences how a religion is interpreted, its rituals conducted, the place assigned to in the life of society, and so forth. (Parekh, 2000, p. 147).

Thus, religious and ethnic identity are interwoven and not easy to disentangle. However, Parekh states that the two can be separated for analytic purposes:

Even when religion and culture are closely connected, they are separable in thought and practice. Just as we can abstract away the cultural basis of a practice and follow it for purely social reasons, we can abstract away its religious basis and follow or respect it for cultural or even exclusively social reasons. (Parekh, 2000, p. 148).

Making this separation may allow a better understanding of what lies behind and motivates abuse and victimisation, including Islamophobic attitudes.

In order to try to estimate the extent of the experience of victimisation among Muslim adolescents in the UK and the extent to which they attributed such victimisation to their religious identity, compared with other aspects of their cultural identity (including

race/ethnicity, colour, and name), Francis and McKenna (2018) analysed the response of 335 13- to 15-year-old Muslim students from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to the seven-item Experience of Victimization Index, alongside a range of personal factors, psychological factors, and religious factors. Their data demonstrated that one in four Muslim students (25%) reported being bullied because of their religion. These students saw their religious identity as being a more important cause of their victimisation than their ethnicity, their colour, or their name. Male and female Muslim students were equally vulnerable to victimisation. Psychological and religious variables predicted individual differences in vulnerability to victimisation among Muslim students.

The findings presented by Francis and McKenna (2018) demand further interrogation and the development of research-informed strategies to address this problem. The aim of the present analyses is to test the extent to which the classic ‘contact hypothesis’ may explain variance in anti-Muslim attitude and may also propose educational intervention strategies that could lower the levels of such attitudes among non-Muslim students.

Contact hypothesis

The contact hypothesis (or intergroup contact theory) proposes that changes in belief about or attitude toward particular groups may come about from direct contact with members of those groups. By bringing people from different backgrounds together and encouraging collaboration, prejudice may be reduced and more positive attitudes toward the other result. The contact hypothesis was originally developed by Gordon Allport. Allport (1954) asserted that prejudice arose because of negative assumptions made about entire groups of people. He suggested that interpersonal contact between members of different groups, if undertaken in appropriate situations, could help to reduce prejudice and improve relations among groups that are experiencing conflict. To be beneficial in reducing prejudice and hostility it has been proposed that the contact situation must be characterised by positive intergroup relations,

what Allport (1954, p. 489) termed, the ‘optimal’ conditions: equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities. An extensive critique of contact theory can be found in Vezzali and Stathi (2017) with an indepth review of this work provided by Lytle (2018).

A number of writers have tried to clarify how contact in itself reduces prejudice (Rothbart & John, 1985; Pettigrew, 1998; Hughes, Hewstone, Tausch, & Cairns, 2007; Everett, 2013). In particular, Pettigrew (1998, pp. 70-73) identified the need for ‘four processes of change’: learning about the out-group; changing behaviour; generating affective ties; and in-group reappraisal. Likewise, according to Everett (2013), contact effectively works through three mechanisms: cognitive (learning about the out-group), behavioural (openness to positive contact experiences), and affective (generating friendships).

For Hughes, Hewstone, Tausch, and Cairns (2007) it is when long-term friendships are formed that the most influence is made in reducing prejudice. As a result, it has been suggested that contact situations should be long enough for different groups to get to know each other and to be comfortable with one another. This is held as more important than cooperating together or learning about the other group and is illustrated by the extended contact hypothesis, that knowing that ingroup members have close relationships or friendships with members of an outgroup can improve attitudes towards the outgroup (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997; and see Zhou, Page-Gould, Aron, Moyer, & Hewstone, 2019 for a meta-analysis of twenty years of research on the extended contact hypothesis).

There are a number of research studies that provide evidence to affirm the success of contact theory in reducing prejudice and bringing about more positive attitudes towards others. Furthermore, according to Hewstone there is evidence to suggest that the positive outcomes of contact continue to occur once the participants are outside the research setting

(Hewstone 2003, p. 352). A wide-ranging and thorough review of empirical research exploring the contact hypothesis, including surveys, experiments, and longitudinal analyses was undertaken by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) in their examination of over 500 pieces of work. Taking into account different methodologies and different types of contact, they reported that increased contact resulted in small but reliable reductions in prejudice. They also found that, while contact under Allport's conditions was particularly effective at reducing prejudice, even unstructured contact gave positive outcomes. For Everett (2013) this is extremely important as even in situations which are not marked by Allport's optimal conditions, levels of contact and prejudice are negatively correlated and thus, 'Allport's proposed conditions should be best seen as of a facilitating, rather than an essential, nature'. A number of more recent studies continue to affirm a beneficial relationship between intergroup contact and more positive attitudes and reduced prejudice toward others (Hewstone & Schmid, 2014; Hewstone, Al Ramiah, Schmid, Floe, van Zalk, Wölfer, & New, 2018; Wilson-Daily, Kimmelmeier, & Prats, 2018).

Research opportunity

The opportunity to examine the impact of the contact hypothesis on the development of anti-Muslim attitudes is afforded by the quantitative strand of the Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity Project (see Francis, Croft, Pyke, & Robbins, 2012). This study was established within the individual differences tradition within the psychology of religion and designed both to include established relevant psychometric instruments and to trial a range of well-conceived items from which other relevant instruments could be constructed. Such conceptualisation was crafted around the incorporation of the abbreviated form of the Junior Eysenck personality Questionnaire Revised (Francis, 1996) that locates individual differences in social attitudes (including religion) within the three-dimensional

personality space defined by the orthogonal indices of extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism.

The quantitative strand of the Young People's Attitude to Religious Diversity Project set out to obtain responses from at least 2,000 13- to 15-year-old students attending state-maintained schools in each of five parts of the UK: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, *and* London. In each nation half of the students were recruited from schools with a religious character (Anglican, Catholic, or joint Anglican and Catholic) and half from schools without a religious character. All told 11,809 students participated in the project.

Among the new psychometrically-tested instruments that evolved from this project are the following: the eleven-item Attitude toward Religious Diversity Index (ARDI; Francis, Croft, Pyke, & Robbins, 2012; Francis & Village, 2014; Francis, Village, Penny, & Neil, 2014); the six-item Outgroup Prejudice Scale (OPS; Francis & Village, 2015); the Astley-Francis Theology of Religions Index (AFTRI; Astley & Francis, 2016); the thirteen-item Scale of Attitude toward Religious Diversity (SARD; Francis, ap Siôn, McKenna, & Penny, 2017); the twelve-item Muslim Attitude toward Religious Diversity Index (MARDI; Francis & McKenna, 2017a); the ten-item Scale of Attitude toward Freedom of Religious Clothing and Symbols in School (SAFORCS; Francis & McKenna, 2017b; Francis Village, McKenna, & Penny, 2018); the seven-item Experience of Victimisation Index (EVI; Francis & McKenna, 2018); and the three-item Index of Rejection of Religion (IRR), the three-item Index of Scientific Fundamentalism (ISF), and the four-item Index of Religious Fundamentalism (IRF) proposed by Francis, Astley, & McKenna, 2019). Building on this research tradition, the present study develops and tests the seven-item Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude (SAMA).

Research aim

Against this background the aim of the present study is to test the power of the contact hypothesis to explain individual differences in the levels of anti-Muslim attitude expressed by 13- to 15-year-old students who participated in the Young Peoples Attitude to Religious Diversity project. Specifically the study needs to develop and to test a measure of anti-Muslim attitude and to propose a measure of contact with Muslims in order to operationalise the contact hypothesis.

In light of the accumulated findings from the Young People's Attitude to Religious Diversity project, the pressing research question (concerning the connection between contact with Muslims and anti-Muslim attitude) needs to be contextualised within recognising the potentially contaminating effects of school factors (schools with a religious character or schools without a religious foundation), geographical factors (England, Wales, and London), personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (employing the Eysenckian three dimensional model of personality), and religious factors (differentiating among the three factors of self-assigned religious affiliation, religious belief, and religious practice). In line with other analyses that have explored the effects of predictor variables on attitude toward minority religious groups (see, for example Francis & Village, 2014; Francis, ap Siôn, McKenna, & Penny, 2017) the present analyses will be conducted on the data provided by participants who identified their religious affiliation either as Christian or as no religion.

The control variables identified above have been selected for the following reasons. Differentiation between schools with a religious character and schools without a religious foundation has been noted on both theoretical and empirical grounds as potentially influencing attitudes toward religious diversity (see Francis & Village, 2014). Differentiation among the three geographical locations has been noted in light of the evidence of the 2011 census showing the different proportions of Muslims present in Wales, England, and London (see Office for National Statistics, 2012). Personal and social factors have been noted in light

of the significant sex differences consistently found in religion-related spheres (see Francis & Penny, 2014) and the significant changes that occur in religion-related spheres during adolescence (see Kay & Francis, 1996). Psychological factors have been noted in light of the consistent findings that the Eysenckian three dimensional model of personality (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975, 1991) predict individual differences both in social attitudes (see Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975, 1976) and in religion-related attitudes (see Francis, 2009). Religious factors have been noted in light of the controversy regarding whether religious commitment promotes or frustrates acceptance of religious diversity (see Francis, Pyke, & Penny, 2015). Religious factors differentiate between self-assigned affiliation, public practice, and personal belief in light of the different effects of these diverse experiences of religiosity (see Francis & Village, 2014).

Method

Procedure

The Young People's Attitude to Religious Diversity Project set out to obtain responses from at least 2,000 13- to 15-year-old students attending state-maintained schools in each of five parts of the UK: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales *and* London. In each nation half of the students were recruited from schools with a religious character (Anglican, Catholic, or joint Anglican and Catholic) and half from schools without a religious character. Within the participating schools questionnaires were administered by the religious education teachers within examination-like conditions. Students were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and given the option not to participate in the project.

Participants

The present analyses were conducted on a sub-sample from the Young People's Attitude to Religious Diversity project, drawing on information provided by 5,811 students from schools in England, Wales, and London who self-identified as either 'no religion' or as

Christian and who completed all the items in the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude. In terms of sex, 2,733 were male, 3,050 were female, and 28 were of undisclosed sex; in terms of school year, 2,925 were in year nine, 2,875 were in year ten, and 11 were of undisclosed school year; in terms of self-assigned religious affiliation, 3,663 self-identified as Christian and 2,148 as of no religion; in terms of geographical location, 2,072 were from England, 2,048 from Wales, and 1,691 from London; in terms of school type, 3,276 were from schools with a religious character and 2,535 from schools without a religious foundation.

Measures

Anti-Muslim attitude was assessed by the newly proposed seven-item Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude (SAMA). This instrument combines items concerned with social distance, acceptance of religious clothing in schools, and wider affective response. An example of social distance is provided by the item, 'I would not like to live next door to Muslims'. An example of acceptance of religious clothing is provided by the item, 'Muslims should be allowed to wear the Burka in school'. An example of wider affective response is provided by the item, 'A lot of harm is done in the world by Muslims'. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1).

Psychological factors were assessed by the abbreviated version of the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (JEPQR-A) developed by Francis (1996) who reported the following Cronbach alpha coefficients: extraversion = .66; neuroticism = .70; psychoticism = .61; lie scale = .57.

Religious affiliation was recorded by a checklist of world faiths and Christian denominations in response to the question, 'What is your religion?' For the current analysis all the Christian categories were collapsed into a single group and those affiliated with other

world faiths were omitted, producing a dichotomous variable: no religion = 0, and Christian = 1.

Religious attendance was assessed by the question, ‘Apart from special occasions (like weddings) how often do you attend a religious worship service (e.g. in a church, mosque or synagogue). Responses were recorded on a seven-point scale: never (1), sometimes (2), at least once a year (3), at least six times a year (4), at least once a month (5), nearly every week (6), and several times a week (7).

Belief in God was assessed by the statement ‘I believe in God’. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), not certain (3), agree (4), and agree strongly (5).

Contact hypothesis was assessed by the statement, ‘I have friends who are Muslims’. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), not certain (3), agree (4), and agree strongly (5).

Personal factors were recorded as two dichotomous variables: male (1) and female (2), and year nine (1) and year ten (2).

School type was recorded as a dichotomous variable: schools without a religious foundation (1) and schools with a religious character (2).

Analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS package, using the frequencies, correlation, reliability, and regression routines. In the regression models school location (distinguishing among England, Wales, and London) was operationalised as dummy variables with England and London entered into the model against Wales as the point of comparison.

Results and discussion

- insert table 1 and table 2 about here -

Table 1 presents the scale properties of the seven-item Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude (SAMA) in terms of the correlations between the individual items and the sum of the other six items, and in terms of the item endorsements with the agree strongly and agree responses combined as 'yes', and the disagree strongly and disagree responses combined as 'no'. These statistics demonstrate variability in item discrimination and quite a high level of negativity toward Muslims. One in five of the young participants would not like to live next door to Muslims (19%) and feel that Muslims should not be allowed to wear the headscarf in school (20%). Two in five of the young participants feel that a lot of harm is done in the world by Muslims (38%). Table 2 presents the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951), mean and standard deviation for the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude. The alpha coefficient confirms a good level of internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .79$). Table 2 also presents the alpha coefficients, means and standard deviations for the three scales proposed by the abbreviated version of the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (JEPQR-A). These data demonstrate that the extraversion scale and the neuroticism scale both achieved alpha coefficients in excess of the threshold of .65 proposed by DeVellis (2003). The lower alpha coefficient achieved by the psychoticism scale is consistent with the recognised difficulties in operationalising this dimension of personality (see Francis, Brown, & Philipchalk, 1992).

- insert table 3 about here -

Table 3 presents the frequency responses for the three single-item measures concerned with belief in God, worship attendance, and contact with Muslims. These data demonstrate quite a high level of church attendance, with nearly one in five of the young participants attending services weekly (18%) and quite a high level of belief in God, with 44% identifying as theists, 26% as agnostics, and 30% as atheists. These figures reflect the sampling strategy, whereby half of the participating schools were schools with a religious character that received higher populations of students from churchgoing backgrounds (see

further Francis & Village, 2019). These data demonstrate that nearly half of the young participants consider that they have friends who are Muslims (48%).

- insert table 4 about here -

Table 4 presents the correlations among the main variables later to be employed in the regression models. These data demonstrate that, when the bivariate correlations are being considered separately, higher levels of anti-Muslim attitudes are associated with both personal factors: being male rather than female, and being in year ten rather than year nine. Higher levels of anti-Muslim attitudes are associated with all three psychological factors: higher scores on the psychoticism scale, higher scores on the extraversion scale, and lower scores on the neuroticism scale. Lower levels of anti-Muslim attitude were associated with all three religious factors: self-identifying as Christian rather than as of no religion, believing in God, and attending worship service. Lower levels of anti-Muslim attitude are also associated with having friends who are Muslim.

The bivariate correlations presented in table 4 also demonstrate the complex patterns of association among the range of predictor variables (personal factors, psychological factors, religious factors, and the measure of contact). For example, not only is sex significantly correlated with scores recorded on the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude (with males recording higher scores), but also with psychoticism scores (males recording higher scores), with neuroticism scores (females recording higher scores), with extraversion scores (females recording higher scores), and with all three religious measures of affiliation, belief in God, and worship attendance (females recording higher scores). Scores recorded on the single-item measure of having friends who are Muslims are also significantly related to the three personality scale scores and to the three religiosity factors. Having friends who are Muslims is more likely among those who score high on extraversion, high on neuroticism, low on psychoticism, high on belief in God, and high on worship attendance, and who also self-

identify as Christian. Moreover, the three religious measures are themselves highly interconnected. It is for these reasons that it is wise to focus the research question within the environment of a series of regression models.

- insert table 5 about here -

Table 5 presents a series of six regression models in which scores recorded on the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude serves as the dependent variable and contact with Muslims is entered as the final step. The increase in the variance accounted for by the models shows that, while the first model was not statistically significant, each of the following five steps added further significant explanatory power to the model. Step one entered first the distinction between schools with a religious character and schools without a religious foundation. On its own this factor was insignificant. Step two entered England and London as two dummy variables against Wales as the reference point. This step added significant explanatory power to the model. Step three entered the two personal factors of sex and age (conceptualised as school year). This step added significant explanatory power to the model. Step four added the three psychological factors (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism). This step added significant explanatory power to the model. Step five added the three religious factors. This step added significant explanatory power to the model. Step six added to the model the variable designed to test the contact hypothesis (having friends who are Muslims). This step too added significant explanatory power to the model. The main conclusion drawn from this sequence of regression models is that having friends who are Muslims is significantly correlated with lower scores on the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude, even after the type of school (religious or not religious), the geographical location (England, Wales, and London), personal factors (sex and school year), psychological factors (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) and religious factors (self-assigned affiliation as Christian, belief in God, and worship attendance) have been taken into account.

Four other features of the final regression model also deserve comment in terms of the beta weights. First, when all other factors are in the model, students in England and London record significantly higher scores than students in Wales on the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude. The religious question in the 2011 census demonstrated that there was a smaller proportion of Muslims within Wales than within England (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Second, when all other factors are in the model, male students record higher scores than female students on the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude. This finding is important because it indicates that the difference between males and females cannot be explained in psychological terms as a consequence of different personality predisposition but needs to be explained more in sociological terms. The different inculturation of anti-Muslim attitudes among male students and among female students requires further investigation. Third, when all other factors are in the model, the psychological factors remain highly significant. In particular scores recorded on the psychoticism scale are important. Students recording high scores on the psychoticism scale may be particularly susceptible to endorsing anti-Muslim views. This is consistent with Eysenck's (1975, 1976) pioneering research that originally linked low psychoticism scores with tenderminded social attitudes and high psychoticism scores with toughminded social attitudes. Fourth, the pattern of beta weights alongside the three religious factors is particularly revealing. When all other factors are in the model there are significant negative paths from both worship attendance and belief in God to scores of anti-Muslim attitude. Students who attend church and/or believe in God tend to record significantly lower scores on the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude. On the other hand, there is now a significant positive path from self-assigned Christian affiliation to scores of anti-Muslim attitude. In other words, cultural Christians (those who claim the Christian designation but neither attend worship services nor believe in God) tend to record

significantly higher scores on the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude, compared with those who are religiously unaffiliated.

Conclusion

The present study set out to test the power of the classic contact hypothesis to account for individual difference in the levels of anti-Muslim attitudes expressed by 13- to 15-year-old students who participated in the Young People's Attitude to Religious Diversity Project. The analysis progressed in four steps and leads to four main conclusions.

The first step involved designing and testing a new measure of anti-Muslim attitude. The seven-item Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude (SAMA) devised from the Young People's Attitude to Religious Diversity Project has good face validity, drawing together items concerned with social distance, acceptance of religious clothing in school, and wider affective response, and good internal consistency reliability, reflected in an alpha coefficient of .79. The conclusion is that this instrument may be commended for use in further studies.

The second step involved proposing a measure of contact with Muslims in order to operationalise the contact hypothesis. The Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity Project contained the following item: 'I have friends who are Muslims'. This item has good face validity and in the present study displayed good construct validity in the sense of achieving the hypothesised correlation with lower anti-Muslim attitude. The conclusion is that this single-item measure may be commended for use in further studies.

The third step involved contextualising the primary research question (concerning the connection between contact with Muslims and anti-Muslim attitude) within a network of potentially contaminating effects of school factors (schools with a religious character or without a religious foundation), geographical factors (England, Wales, and London), personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism), and religious factors (differentiating among the three factors of self-assigned religious

affiliation, religious belief, and religious practice). The conclusion supported the wisdom of such contextualisation and drew attention to the effects of geographical factors (anti-Muslim attitude was higher in England and London than in Wales), of personal factors (anti-Muslim attitude was higher among male students than among female students), of psychological factors (anti-Muslim attitudes were associated with higher psychoticism scores, higher extraversion scores, and lower neuroticism scores), and of religious factors (anti-Muslim attitudes were associated with non-churchgoers, atheists and people who self-identified as Christian but neither practised nor believed).

The fourth step involved structuring a set of regression models with the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude as the dependent variable and with Muslim friends entered as the final step after taking into account school factors, geographical factors, personal factors, psychological factors, and religious factors. The conclusion is that the regression analyses supported the contact hypothesis. The young participants who count Muslims among their friends score significantly lower on the Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude.

The limitations with the present study arise from the way in which the present analyses were conducted on a dataset designed to address a number of related, but distinct, research questions. The Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude (SAMA) could have been enriched by including a larger number of more diverse items. The findings generated by this seven-item scale clearly support the value of future research investing in the development of a more highly nuanced instrument. The operationalisation of the contact hypothesis through a single-item measure could have been enriched by the development of a multi-item scale. The findings generated by this single-item measure clearly support the value of future research investing in the development of a more sophisticated instrument. In spite of such limitations, the findings carry important implications for religious education.

The key research finding from this study indicates that young people who get to know Muslim peers as their friends are less likely to hold anti-Muslim attitudes. They are less likely to think that a lot of harm is done in the world by Muslims. They are less likely to feel that they would not like to live next door to Muslims. They are more likely to support the wearing of distinctive Muslim clothing in schools. They are more likely to be interested in finding out about Muslims. The problem is that not all young people have the opportunity to grow up alongside young Muslims and get to know them as friends.

Drawing on the findings from this research study Francis and ap Siôn (2019) discuss the journey from educational research into classroom practice. They argue that,

The development of open and positive attitudes towards difference underpins respect for diversity. Foundations for open and positive attitudes need to be put in place during the early years. Open and positive attitudes grow from familiarity with and contact with diverse populations (the so-called contact hypothesis).

From these principles ap Siôn and Francis have developed with sponsorship from the Welsh Government two curriculum series, *Exploring Why* and *Exploring our World* for young learners. These two series are on open access at: <http://www.st-marys-centre.org.uk>

These two series are designed to bring young learners into contact with young people from a variety of faith backgrounds. By identifying with the central characters of these books (Aled and Siân) young learners are brought into contact with Aled and Siân's friends. Aled and Siân themselves have no explicit religious identity. Yet through their friends they are welcomed not only into the world of young Muslims (Ahmed and Salma) but also into the world of young Christians (Peter and Mary), and young Jews (Nathan and Rachel).

Francis and ap Siôn (2019) argue that the natural curiosity displayed by Aled and Siân as they enter into the diverse worlds of their friends is infectious, and carries us along with them on their journey of discovery. The consequence is that Aled and Siân gain access to

deeper friendships and to richer experiences. The consequence is that the young learners who journey alongside Aled and Siân share vicariously in that experience. The consequence too is that Aled and Siân's friends who grow up within religious families may live happier and safer lives.

Note

Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity Project (AHRC Reference: AH/G014035/1) was a large-scale mixed methods research project investigating the attitudes of 13- to 16-year-old students across the United Kingdom. Students from a variety of socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds from different parts of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, with the addition of London as a special case, took part in the study. Professor Robert Jackson was principal investigator and Professor Leslie J. Francis was co-investigator. Together they led a team of qualitative and quantitative researchers based in the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, within the Centre for Education Studies, University of Warwick. The project was part of the AHRC/ESRC Religion and Society Programme and ran from 2009-2012.

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Table 1

Scale of Anti-Muslim Attitude: Psychometric properties

	<i>r</i>	Yes %	? %	No %
A lot of good is done in the world by Muslims ⁺	.45	23	46	31
I am interested in finding out about Muslims ⁺	.35	32	21	47
A lot of harm is done in the world by Muslims	.28	38	35	27
I would not like to live next door to Muslims	.45	19	19	62
Muslims should be allowed to wear the headscarf in school ⁺	.72	59	22	20
Muslims should be allowed to wear the Burka in school ⁺	.73	48	26	26
Muslims should be allowed to wear the Niqab in school ⁺	.74	48	28	23

Note: ⁺ These items are reverse coded to generate the scale score

r = correlation between individual item and sum of other six items

Table 2

Scale properties

	N Items	alpha α	M	SD	Scale range	
					Low	High
Anti-Muslim Attitude	7	.79	19.76	5.98	7	35
Extraversion	6	.69	4.70	1.54	0	6
Neuroticism	6	.68	3.13	1.80	0	6
Psychoticism	6	.58	1.14	1.29	0	6

Table 3

Frequency statistics

	%
<i>I have friends who are Muslims</i>	
agree strongly	20
agree	28
not certain	28
disagree	9
disagree strongly	14
<i>I believe in God</i>	
agree strongly	24
agree	20
not certain	26
disagree	10
disagree strongly	20
<i>I attend religious worship services</i>	
several times a week	2
nearly every week	16
at least once a month	6
at least six times a year	5
sometimes	18
at least once a year	11
never	43

Table 4

Correlation matrix

	SAMA	MF	Be	At	Ch	Ps	Nu	Ex	Sy
Sex	-.20***	.01	.12***	.06***	.05***	-.25***	.27***	.06***	.00
School year (SY)	.04**	-.03*	.03*	-.04**	.00	.00	.01	.05***	
Extraversion (Ex)	.06***	.05***	.01	-.07***	.00	.08***	-.14***		
Neuroticism (Ne)	-.09***	.04**	.07***	.03*	.00	.01			
Psychoticism (Ps)	.30***	-.05**	-.17***	-.14***	-.09***				
Christian (Ch)	-.08***	.04**	.56***	.51***					
Attendance (At)	-.18***	.14***	.51***						
Belief (Be)	-.23***	.13***							
Muslim Friends (MF)	-.25***								

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5

Regression models

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
<i>School type</i>						
Religious character	-.00	-.00	.01	.01	.05***	.02
<i>School location</i>						
England		.06***	.05***	.05***	.04**	.05***
London		-.03	-.02	-.01	.02	.07***
<i>Personal factors</i>						
Sex			-.20***	-.12***	-.11***	-.12***
Age			.04**	.04**	.03*	.02
<i>Psychological factors</i>						
Extraversion				.04**	.04**	.05***
Neuroticism				-.05***	-.04***	-.03*
Psychoticism				.26***	.23***	.23***
<i>Religious factors</i>						
Christian affiliation					.08***	.07***
Church attendance					-.11***	-.08***
Belief in God					-.17***	-.15***
<i>Contact hypothesis</i>						
Muslim friends						-.22***
Total R^2	.000	.005	.046	.116	.152	.196
Δ	.000	.005***	.041***	.070***	.037***	.044***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$